

## Intercultural Theatre today (2010)

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What does the term 'intercultural theatre' mean today? The question seems paradoxical, or even provocative, as all kinds of cultural exchanges regulate our daily life and any artistic adventure goes back to the most varied sources and audiences. And indeed, we have moved a long way from the intercultural experiences of the 1980s of a Peter Brook or an Ariane Mnouchkine. Interculturalism, a fairly new term (1970s) which was once a contested notion, has become a very common thing. It might be therefore worthwhile to examine what this notion refers to and to find out if it can be of any use to describe today's theatre and performance.

### 1) CRISIS OR NORMALIZATION ?

#### 1) Recent historical landmarks

The fall of the Berlin wall and of communism in 1989 represents a turning point for intercultural thinking. It means the questioning, or even the disappearance of the universal principle, as well as of proletarian internationalism, which functioned as the finest jewel of socialism. It puts an end to an ideology which maintained by force the different states of Eastern Europe under its protective wing (in the Soviet Union or in Yugoslavia). Intercultural theatre becomes the best suited formula in a world with no open conflict between nations or between classes, the best adapted and available solution to the law of the international market and to the progressive disappearance of borders and nation-states<sup>1</sup>. In the last ten years, borders of all kinds seem to escape any control: since 1989

the political and geographical borders are fluid; after 9/11 terrorism escapes surveillance; since 2008 capitalism itself seems out of control.

In the 1970s and 1980s, interculturalism was rather welcomed by all political powers, right or left, because it seemed willing to establish a bridge between separate cultures or ethnic groups which used to ignore or fight one another. After 9/11, however, a certain fear of lesser-known cultures sometimes leads to a suspicion of intercultural performance. This might be a sign that the metaphor of the exchange between cultures, between past and present, no longer functions very well and that one should at least reconsider its theory. The theory and practice of intercultural theatre of the eighties seem to be left behind by current theatre and performance. As if they could no longer be thought of in terms of national or cultural identity. So what happened in these last twenty years, while politicians kept advocating intercultural cooperation?

#### 2) "Theatre as foreign to society"

According to Robert Abirached, theatre has become foreign to contemporary society (at least in France): "Until about 1970, the audience was aware of its unity. It was a national audience. The National Popular Theatre was the theatre of the nation, a nation whose objectives, references, collective symbols were common to all. This culture was common to the people and the bourgeoisie. This society exploded, for many reasons: there was an increasingly brutal differentiation between

suburb and city centre, between populations coming from outside with their own culture and French and European culture. Instead of a coherent audience, we had a multiplication of micro-societies, which created their own theatre<sup>2</sup>“.

The intercultural theatre of the last forty years is a possible answer to the fragmentation of audiences and genres. Indeed, it attempts to broaden the national and political perspective by approaching “foreign” cultures. These cultures are mixed according to a central vision, that of a (usually Western) director.

Interculturalism—one tends to forget it—also functions the other way round: whenever a non-European culture uses European classics, it still maintains its own culture of stage traditions. So one should also open the debate to the way all these cultures/nations/theatres handle European or American authors and themes, with what presuppositions, intentions, and with what prejudices and prohibitions. Surprisingly, in Europe and everywhere else, Western intercultural theatre did not become a new genre which would federate all other genres, and, paradoxically, it even transformed itself into a globalized theatre.

### 3) Crisis of national identity

This deep transformation can be largely explained by a change of cultural as well as national identities. With the end of the two competing political and geographical blocks, with the domination of a global, supranational economy, the different nations, minorities and identities seem to “reawaken”, they grasp that no central power can control them any long. But at the same time, they lose their economic and symbolic power, since they now depend on a global economy. The slow, but inexorable disintegration of the nation-states (at least as far as real power is concerned) confirms the disappearance of iso-

lated cultures, bound to nation-states and geared to large distinct entities. From that moment on, the intercultural becomes the general rule, it is no longer controllable or manageable by nation-states and by intellectuals who claim (in vain) to represent them. In the same manner of the evolution of the world population and of the migrations (according to Appadurai), cultures and TV viewers are deterritorialized<sup>3</sup>. Instead of distinct entities, we now have different “communities of sentiments<sup>4</sup>“.

Confronted with this loss of identity, two opposing reactions are frequent: either a sudden tough line insisting on identity, a strained resistance, critical of any change, an attitude which becomes quickly reactionary or even racist and which seeks to re-establish at any cost the national identity; or, on the contrary, a postmodern casualness, an economic laissez-faire, an acceptance of the change of times, an ironical rejection of any resistance and of any theoretical explanation, and finally an acceptance of the commodification of culture.

## II POLITICAL AND THEORETICAL CRISIS

### 1) Crisis of political correctness

An original sin weighs heavy on intercultural theatre and this argument is relentlessly used by the self-declared defenders of the non-Euro-American cultures treated by Western directors: interculturalism is seen to exploit shamelessly foreign cultures, to behave like a colonizer<sup>5</sup>. We all remember the furious attacks of Rustom Bharucha against Peter Brook’s orientalism or against the Western theorists of the intercultural movement. We heard repeatedly the same accusations of colonialism on the part of the West against these defenceless countries: directors are accused of plundering themes and styles with

no consideration for the true cultural identities of these cultures.

These attacks might have tempered the artists' enthusiasm, but they obviously did not stop an irrepressible move. They might partially explain the relative failure and decline of this current of contemporary theatre production. And, admittedly, Dennis Kennedy is right to say that the intercultural movement was not able to position itself between the traditional productions of the classics and the deconstructions (inspired by Derrida). Deconstruction, such as practised by the French director Antoine Vitez for instance, viewed cultural and festive theatre performances as moralizing and naive, only appropriate for a harmless festival or for an evening gathering of boy-scouts around a bonfire...

But "times are a changing" (as Bob Dylan used to say!): *mise-en-scène* no longer attempts to signify metaphorically a country or a period through another culture far away in time and space. It no longer feels the need to invigorate its domestic theatre with exotic, more or less aphrodisiac products which so deeply inspired Antonin Artaud. It no longer dares to claim, as Mnouchkine did, approvingly but naively, that "theatre is Oriental". Whereas artists often have a natural relationship to other cultures, devoid of complexes, intellectuals and well-meaning spectators are terrified by the possible *faux pas* in the representation and appreciation of the Other and of this other culture.

## 2) Crisis of theory

The theory of cultural exchanges and of interculturalism goes through a crisis, because the model of exchange, of communication and of translation, and also of "the gift", in the anthropological sense, and of sharing, no longer functions appropriately to describe these hybrid works. These works no longer need to define themselves as a confluence of

cultures, as if it were an obvious goal. Indeed, what would be the point of an intercultural theory if cultures are already intertwined? The usual distinction between inter- and intra-cultural is not always easy to establish. The distinction between cross-cultural and intercultural (or transcultural) is useful, but also purely theoretical: 'cross' is supposed to suggest the mixture, hybridity (as in 'cross-breeding'), whereas 'inter' or 'trans' is supposed to refer to the universal similarity, in the sense of Grotowski, Barba, or Brook.

These three directors, for instance, have been criticized for their exploration of theatrical universals, which supposedly exist in any culture. They have been attacked because of their lack of concrete political or historical analysis. Brook has been accused of having an essentialist vision of the human being, which was reduced to some human link, an essence perceptible in whatever context. Barba is said to be searching within the pre-expressive for supra or even pre-cultural properties, which are common to all existing forms of performance and dance. This kind of reproach is not unjustified, but it applies much less to the more recent productions of Barba, Mnouchkine or Brook, and of many others.

The example of Peter Brook's last production, *Eleven and Twelve*, as we shall see below, points to the dilemma of intercultural theatre, to its two temptations: either to present a universal, or even universalist, vision of the human being, and bring down the wrath of the eulogists of cultural difference upon oneself; or, on the contrary, to insist on the specific character of each culture, to refuse any fusion and any synthesis, and consequently to move towards an extreme case of particularism, which quickly degenerates into multiculturalism, or even sectarian communitarianism. As Ernesto Laclau has shown, leftist parties and democratic reflection have wavered for a long time between these two positions: "democratic discourse was centred on equality beyond difference. This is true for

Rousseau's notion of "volonté générale" (general will) as well as for the Jacobinism of the class which is supposed to bring emancipation according to Marxism. Today, on the contrary, democracy is bound to the recognition of pluralism and difference. Intercultural theatre cannot escape such a debate. It cannot avoid the question of its socio-economic basis and the political and economic analysis of the transformations created by globalization. Before we embark on this analysis, however we must acknowledge the great diversity of interculturalism and of the related genres.

### 3) Transformations of intercultural experiences

The denomination 'intercultural theatre' is falling out of use. The term 'intercultural performance' would be more suitable to signal from the outset the opening to very different 'cultural performances'.

Intercultural performance can be distinguished from the following genres, of which it is often a variant or a specialization:

\* *Multilingual theatre*, in such multilingual zones as Catalonia or Luxemburg, relies on the bi- or multilingual competence of the audience in order to constantly change the language. A comedic performer and stand-up comedian like Fellag (from Algeria) constantly moves from French to Arabic or Berber, depending on the cultural allusions or untranslatable idiomatic expressions or puns.

\* *Theatre in the original language* (as in film) is often given subtitles, or rather surtitles, which allows for an original and appropriate reception, while letting the audience hear the original text with the albeit restricting option to read it.

\* *Syncretic theatre* uses textual, musical, and visual material which it borrows from several cultures, particularly indigenous cultures

which are thus mixed with European forms, and often deal with problems of colonialism or neo-colonialism.

\* *Postcolonial theatre* connects the dramatic world and writing, for instance of Derek Walcott or Wole Soyinka, with the language and the culture of the former colonizer, but also enriches this language and culture. The *mise-en-scène* borrows from performing techniques of the original culture by confronting them with the more European practices of the former colonizer.

\* *Creolized theatre* and (more often) *creolized poetry* look for the encounter, the difference, the relationship, of writing "in presence of all languages of the world" (Edouard Glissant), so as to better fight the standardizing globalization. They refer above all to the language, enriched in a *Tout-monde* (all-world), which, however chaotic and unpredictable, is far from multiculturalism.

\* *Multicultural theatre*, in the strict and political sense of the word, does not exist, because it would deny the salutary contacts and exchanges between different cultures. In the same manner, a communitarist theatre, which would lock itself in just one culture, religion or community, would only have an internal and closed visibility.

\* In contrast, a *community theatre* is working for a local or regional community in the broad sense of the term, not for a community sealed within itself.

\* *Minority theatre* is not necessarily intercultural. It aims at ethnic or linguistic minorities, without trying or desiring to isolate itself from the multicultural society in which it develops. Some playwrights come from the African-American or African-British or Asian-American minorities: e.g. in England, Roy Williams with his play *Joe Guy* (2007) or in the United States Sung Rno with *w(A)ve*.

\* *Theatre for tourists*, which is obviously not presented as such, exists in countries dependent on tourism and which wish to offer Western tourists an accessible, exotic and presentable image of their native culture<sup>6</sup>.

\* *Festival theatre* is directed at an international and often expert audience. It seeks to adapt itself to the fashions and expectations of the time, to make its culture accessible to an international audience by all sorts of compromises.

\* *Cosmopolitan theatre*, as it is called in accordance with the research of Appadurai, Reinelt<sup>7</sup> or Rebellato, tries to differentiate oneself from a performance which is more globalized than intercultural. Supposedly, it is "distinct from the ethics governing globalization."<sup>8</sup>

All these categories which have something in common with the intercultural movement are often interconnected and the list is open. All feel the impact of globalization. So does intercultural performance amount to a globalized theatre?

### III FROM INTERCULTURAL THEATRE TO GLOBALIZED PERFORMANCE: RECENT EXAMPLES

If it is true that culture is a reality which seems to dwindle irremediably before one's very eyes, how could intercultural theatre itself not be in complete and constant mutation or even disintegration? But are we confronted with shows which have become incomprehensible, or with shows which may no longer be considered politically correct?

Let us put aside cases of extreme modification: they have been thoroughly studied by Dan Rebellato in his analysis of megamusicals (like *Cats*) and of what he calls 'McTheatre'. Beginning with three recent

typical cases of globalized interculturalism, let us examine whether the genre of intercultural performance has renewed itself and in what directions it has evolved in the last ten years. Can we still talk about 'intercultural performance', and can it renew itself, in spite of the socio-economic constraints of globalization?

#### 1) Historical discrepancy and rewriting: Michel Vinaver and Oriza Hirata

For the first time in his career, Vinaver allowed another author to adapt, and even rewrite one of his plays: the Japanese playwright Oriza Hirata adapted Vinaver's play *Par-dessus bord (Overboard)* into a Japanese context, but the transposition was not purely linguistic and geographical, from France to Japan. The shift was from a family-owned French toilet paper company in the 1960s to a Japanese multinational producer of toilet bowls, which has just been bought by a French company. The comic dimension of the work is produced not only by the difference of method between the classical European use of toilet paper and the Japanese practice of water and warm air flow. It arises, as in Vinaver's original play, from the discrepancy between the trivial, scatological aspect of toilet paper and the reality of economic mutations.

Both the socio-economic issue and the intercultural dimension have been considerably modified. By historicizing Vinaver's play, by transposing it to contemporary Japan, the director Arnaud Meunier invents a new form of theatre which is at the same time political and intercultural. The meeting of two writings and styles, a rare occasion in intercultural experiences, considerably enriches this genre, which is too often limited to the confrontation of acting styles. The assembling of themes and dialogues is already accomplished in the adaptation. There is no more need to confront and assemble different national

styles, different performing traditions. What is more important is the difference of work culture and ethics. The acting style of the Japanese actors is Western: they sometimes speak in French and their French colleagues try their Japanese. But this does not make a fusion French-Japanese performance, even if the director defines his style as 'fusional'. Not only is there no cultural fusion, but the point of the play of Vinaver-Hirata is that there is no possible synthesis and meeting in the economic field as well as in the life style and affectivity. More than the idea of an impossible fusion in this new type of interculturalism, we can observe the very rare convergence between a deep economic concern and an epidermal sensibility to cultural difference, even if this can only be experienced at the level of human skin, with or without toilet paper.

## 2) Deterritorialization of the ethnoscape: Robert Lepage's *The Blue Dragon*

Robert Lepage's theatre offers numerous examples of globalized theatre, not only by its mode of production, of rehearsal and its global and international functioning, but because of its themes. *The Blue Dragon*, a kind of continuation, twenty years later, of *The Dragon's trilogy*, offers all the ingredients of intercultural theatre: it tells the story of Pierre, a Québécois who came to China to study calligraphy and painting, and of Claire, his former friend, who visits him and would like to adopt a Chinese child. Xiao Ling, Pierre's new girl-friend, is now expecting Pierre's child...

The characters travel between the cultures, but they do not embody them and they do not attempt to synthesize them. The rather stereotypical Chinese cultural elements are like the projection of their and our imagination. This cultural model, Québécois or Chinese, has nothing fixed and identity-

bound, and no identifiable local substance; on the contrary, it has a volatile shape. It seems to correspond to Appadurai's definition of today's non-substantial, volatile cultural elements: "Culture thus shifts from being some sort of inert, local substance to being a rather more volatile form of difference."<sup>9</sup> This culture constructs what Appadurai calls an 'ethnoscape': "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree."<sup>10</sup> The three characters of *The Blue dragon*, in the same manner as the inhabitants of our real world according to Appadurai, are no longer the prisoners of a fixed national identity, they are above it, in the air, constantly displaced, free as a bird, changing their identity according to their current needs. The epilogue of their story has three possible endings, which are acted out successively, thus indicating that there is no longer any concluding, moralizing narrative and that all depends on the audience's choice. So the *ménage à trois* functions well, although in a void, as if one no longer could connect their story with the reality, a globalized and optional reality. The narrative of their meetings is fluid, like these migratory flows of today which, according to Appadurai, move in a delocalized 'transnation', thus replacing the geographical and cultural identities of sixty years ago.

## 3) Performing identity: Guillermo Gomez-Pena: *Ethno-Techno*

In his whole activity as a performer, Gomez-Pena tackles the problem of national and ethnic identity. As a Mexican living in the United States, he knows perfectly well the difficulties of the Chicanos to integrate into

North American society. The performer naturally endeavours to test the limits of “intercultural political correctness”. His own body (or here the Club Girl’s) is the battlefield, the field of provocation which he uses in order to observe the inscription of the different identities, particularly ethnic, racial, sexual and political, on his own body. By exaggerating the grotesque effects of all these identity markers, he challenges the dominant ‘good taste’, while revealing the constructed character of identities. Performance art becomes the best way to denounce the idealization of anthropological theatre.

Each sketch of *Ethno-Techno* deals with a specific difficulty of establishing and grasping identity; it questions any retention of cultural harmony or of stable identity, of any idealized understanding between peoples or groups. For instance in *The Kabuki club girl*, we have a rapid succession of colour photos centred on the face, on the half open dress and on the attitudes of what seems to be a Japanese Geisha; at the same time music (percussion) gives every filmic shot a strong impulse. This alternating montage underscores the violence perpetrated on the Kabuki Club Girl who is humiliated by the camera – i.e. by our gaze-taking shot after shot, forcing her to uncover hidden parts of her body. In between these (actually very beautiful) shots in red, the film inserts black and white photos of a Western fashion show in front of an obviously fascinated African audience in their own country. Locked in their minibus, where they change clothes, the white models get ready, eat a biscuit, under the greedy and curious gaze of the African people. The models only exist in the gaze of the other, in the same manner as the Japanese Girl has to tease the customers by breaking the cultural code of the Japanese Geisha: a slack body attitude, a half open traditional dress. The incompatibility of two worlds, or rather three worlds, Japanese, African and Euro-American, the shock of colours, of musical rhythms, all this refers to

an impossible synthesis, harmony or reconciliation between different cultures. This visual provocation presents more than a long theoretical discourse on globalization.

Thanks to this type of performance, Gomez-Pena gives a new life and a new impulse to a ‘correct’, but frightened intercultural theatre. The actor’s body is the location where the violence of mercantile relationships can be made visible.

Resistance to cultural identity and promotion of the aesthetic: Robert Wilson, Akram Khan.

Let me take two examples of another use of different foreign cultures, not in the sense of exchange of identities, but as a means to an aesthetic re-creation, or rather a new creation: Robert Wilson (with the example of Puccini’s opera *Madame Butterfly*) and Akram Khan (with a contemporary choreography inspired by Indian traditional dance Kathak).

Bob Wilson’s productions around the whole world are definitely a good example of a globalized management of theatre. The different components of his productions, often elaborated in different locations, are exchangeable, assembled and disassembled according to the theatres and performers, loaned out, subcontracted by collaborators who prepare materials in advance before the final gaze, assemblage and final word of the Master.

However, the mastering of all the stage elements does not aim at confronting cultural systems, or at respecting any assumed authenticity in the representation of cultural allusions. The only thing that counts for Wilson is the purely aesthetic precision and abstraction, the process of refining and concentrating the artistic matter. In this respect, and as we see in Wilson’s *Madame Butterfly*, one certainly can discover here and there the influence of a given civilization or even of a work typical of a given geographic area, but the important and essential issue is not in the system of cultural quotations or in the exact-

ness of the comparisons. Hence this fruitful paradox: Wilson can be at the same time located in the continuity of American contemporary art (like minimal art, abstract expressionism, pop art, painting of Rothko) and in the sensibility of Buddhist art of the Far East. The result thus is purely aesthetic, with no concession made to any ethnic belonging or any anthropological exactness. The question of identity, of a cultural specificity, does not apply, because Wilson has knowingly put aside any fidelity to any existing cultures. (Although, this might be characteristic of a postmodern North American attitude, perhaps?).

This implies a perfectly mastered use of gestures, a hieratic, simple but coherent acting style, which does not distract the spectator from the voices, the music, and the scenography. Any sense of cultural belonging (Japan, Italy, the geographical origin of the singers, etc.) is seen as irrelevant, as only distracting from music, painting, from *l'art pour l'art*. This "postnational order" (to use Appadurai's term) now appears almost everywhere, and particularly in the political system of the United States; it can be sensed, so to speak, in this kind of international art, which is intentionally detached from any recognizable ethnic belonging. The price to pay for this cultural erasure is a drifting away from any psychological or social verisimilitude, which, in a way, diminishes considerably the pleasure taken in the story-telling and the reality effects, as if they could alienate us from the pure vocal, musical, gestural and scenographical performance.

The method is different in the choreography of Akram Khan, a dancer and choreographer based in London. Khan uses as a base his own traditional Indian dance, Kathak, and invents his own choreography for a group of five dancers (including himself), using a musical adaptation with a slightly rhythmical pattern. By putting his dancers in a space conceived by the sculptor Anish Kapoor,

Khan stretches the codified movements of the Kathak tradition by using short repetitive patterns. The overall choreography keeps the same rhythmic pattern, while allowing the bodies of the performers to inscribe themselves clearly and synchronically in the space. More than a transfer of an Indian tradition towards a Western dance pattern, we have here an extension of the principle of composition, sometimes using simultaneous repetition, sometimes a slight asynchronous moment with the same sequence. The Indian basic pattern remains the point of departure for the music and the repetitive choreographic figures.

##### 5) Return to a simple narrative:

###### Peter Brook

Brook's latest production, *Eleven and Twelve*, reveals the considerable evolution of intercultural theatre since the beginnings of interculturalism in the 1970s and it proves, if need be, that globalization does not necessarily mean the impossibility of a return to what he calls a poor, immediate and rough theatre, as Brook practiced it, particularly before his time in France at the International Centre for Theatre Research and before his travels to Africa at the beginning of the 1970s. The play, inspired by the narrative of the African writer Amadou Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar (The Life and teaching of Tierno Bokar)*, tells the story of this real person, a Sufi master, of whom the author became a disciple. The play shows two religious individuals in conflict because of futile theological arguments. When confronted with the French colonial administration, they will finally be reconciled. Bokar is a wise man of the Moslem faith, and not the other way around. Beyond any religious affiliation, the exchange is human and tolerant. The narrator tells and dramatizes a few scenes from the life of the wise African, where common sense and tolerance go hand in hand.



It is only in their opposition that the cultural traditions can be defined. Everything in the acting, in the characterization, in the use of the body, helps us distinguish, sometimes as in a caricature, the colonizers from the colonized, European arrogance from African common sense. Two types of culture, two ways of governing and of seeing life are contrasted: not only physical appearance, but the way of holding one's body. This kind of interculturalism "light" renounced the idea of explaining the main cultural traditions as for instance in Brook's dramatization of *The Mahabharata* (1985). It consists merely of a few cultural leftovers concentrated on a few objects, or of a beautiful light which reminds us of Africa, or of several different English accents. These details correspond to the representation of Africa in the old days. They have little in common with our current life, with the lives we can immediately perceive outside when we leave the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord: here we could immediately experience other ways of living, other transplanted cultures, a whole new politics of migrations and of the circulation of minorities, whose mobility has been examined by Arjun Appadurai and Marc Augé, a mobility in space more than a mobility in time.

In his reference to Africa, Brook avoids any kind of exotic performance thanks to his use of actors of different origins, thanks to a very warm way of lighting the show, and to simple and poor objects. Africa and religion, it is suggested, are universal. The important issue remains the human encounter, which was and remains a fundamental feature of intercultural approach. A return to origins?

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

- 1) In the 1970s, when it was thriving, intercultural theatre, was taught its first lesson and given its first prescriptions. Since then, the nature and the conception

of this theatre, clumsily called 'intercultural', have considerably evolved. Times have radically changed. The effects of globalization on our way of doing and understanding theatre are increasingly evident. Hence the renewal, or the complete mutation of interculturalism; hence our growing consideration for the phenomena of globalization, our will to think of theatre according to the world which produces and receives it, taking into account its socioeconomic and ethical dimensions.

- 2) The reflexion on globalization and its impact on theatre allowed us to modify our vision of intercultural performance, which used to be too dependent on the essentialist and often normative conceptions of the 1970s, a vision too obsessed with the legitimacy of representing another culture.
- 3) The main difficulty today seems to be to find the connection between the work of sociologists and economists on globalization, for instance of Appadurai, and the renewed possibilities of interculturalism in the arts. What could for instance be the link, in current theatre production, to the new mode of consumption, what Appadurai calls the 'aesthetics of the ephemeral', to current theatre production?
- 4) The examples shown here obviously do not cover the whole scope of intercultural performance. In a way, they are already out of fashion, because they no longer correspond to the evolution of society (at least French or European society). This is so, because intercultural performance is a notion which stems from the 1960s, from the utopia of social mixture, of hybridization, of social progress, of sharing rather than plundering. Many sociologists and anthropologists like Arjun Appadurai or Marc Augé no longer speak of cultures in contact or of exchange between cultures,

and prefer to use the adjective 'cultural', in order to indicate the volatility of the notion of stable culture. Nowadays we more often find cultural components suspended in the air, components, which no longer rely on ancestral traditions or on a location and a time where these cultures would have been kept. In the France of the suburbs, *cités* (deprived estates) and even of towns, there is hardly any intermixture of cultures, or only at the fantastical level of a few subsidized theatres which might invite the population of migrants or of the French "*issus de l'immigration*" (descendants of immigrants) to take part in a writing workshop or in a public performance (for instance in Stains, Gennevilliers, Nanterre). So we end up with this sad paradox: the call for a dialogue of cultures is often nothing but an empty, demobilizing and apolitical slogan. The question is: can intercultural theatre transform itself into a theatre of urban cultures in the suburbs of our larger French and European cities?

- 5) Whatever the answer is, we have come a long way from the "classical" interculturalism of the 1980s. We no longer believe in an authentic national identity, in a culture which would belong to a single nation or people, which would be embodied by an organic Intellectual who would speak in its name. We now have to conceptualize national or cultural belonging differently, we have to reveal its inconsistency, its myth, its mystification. In short, we have to water down our country wine and our 'us us us' culture with some postmodern or relativistic water. The "diasporic public spheres" Appadurai talks about, with their mixed, multi-ethnic and multiple identities, are no longer based on fixed identities, on defined belongings, but on clusters, on regroupings of practices. We can no longer hope to have the cultures meet. At best we can

regroup these clusters. This new situation finds a certain correspondence in the way *mise-en-scène* in the last twenty years seems to be functioning. Indeed, *mise-en-scène* in this lapse of time, in response to this cultural confrontation, is already a mix and a cluster of practices from and for the stage. For instance, the dramatic text is already intertextual, it is written and performed for and in concrete bodies; each gesture is already quoting other gestures; music is a crucible for other types of music; bodies are mixed, hybrid in their appearance. So theatre, whether called intercultural or not, is made of composite materials, is made of body and mind. This is the reason why the intercultural mix happens almost automatically. All theatre production is an intercultural production, which makes its analysis so difficult.

- 6) What if the intercultural were in fact only an interartistic practice, a form of interdisciplinarity, a crossing, a confrontation and an addition of arts, of techniques, of acting modes? Take for example the integration of hip hop in contemporary dance, take this fusion of Baroque music, of classical dance and hip hop in the choreographic work of Dominique Hervieux and José Montalvo: Are these cultures? Certainly not in the ethnological sense of the term, but definitely in the sense of high culture which ends up integrating a popular, marginal, parodical culture. Or maybe it is the other way round?

Interdisciplinarity itself contains different disciplines, which themselves are composed of different (foreign) cultures and of several cultural levels.

- 7) Let's bet that intercultural theatre, if it wants to live on or even merely continue to exist, will have to recover, or even discover, its sense of humour; that it will have to learn not to take itself too seri-

ously, to be able to laugh about itself, about its limitations and its failures, its future and its origins, however sacred they might be; that it will remember that it is, after all, only theatre art<sup>11</sup>...

## Notes

- 1 See Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at large. Cultural dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- 2 Robert Abirached, "Le théâtre étranger à notre société", Forum du Théâtre européen. 2008, Nice, *Du Théâtre*, n°17, Juin 2009, p.241.
- 3 Appadurai, op.cit., p4
- 4 Appadurai, op.cit., p.8.
- 5 For instance, according to Dan Rebellato, "theatre scholars have tended to consider it an instance of 'interculturalism': the contested and controversial history of Western theatre's attempt to co-opt (usually) Asian forms to invigorate its own culture." (*Theatre and Globalization*, London, Palgrave, 2009, p.3)
- 6 See Dennis Kennedy, op. cit., Ch. 5, "the Spectator as tourist". See also : Christopher B. Balme. *Pacific Performances. Theatricality and Cross-Cultural Encounters in the South Seas*. London, Palgrave, 2007. In particular, Chapter 7: 'As You Always Imagined it': The Pacific as Tourist Spectacle.
- 7 Janelle Reinelt, "What is Political Theatre Today?", STR Lecture report, Wickham Lectures, 2008.
- 8 Rebellato, op.cit., p.71.
- 9 Appadurai, op.cit., p.60.
- 10 Op. cit., p.33.
- 11 My thanks to Les Essif for checking the English of this lecture delivered at the University of Tennessee in February 2010.